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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 52

[FV-97-326]

Quality Through Verification and Other Audit-Based Quality Assurance Programs for the Fruit and Vegetable Industry

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announces a forthcoming public meeting for interested parties especially firms and individuals who provide quality assurance or laboratory support to the fruit and vegetable industry to discuss the Agency's Quality Through Verification Program and certain other audit-based quality assurance programs operated by the Agency's Fruit and Vegetable Division.

DATES: February 6, 1997, 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

ADDRESSES: U.S. Department of Agriculture, South Building, Fruit and Vegetable Division, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Agricultural Marketing Service Conference Room 3501, Washington, DC 20250. Telephone (202) 690-0262.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Eric Forman, Deputy Director, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, Fruit and Vegetable Division, P.O. Box 96456, Room 2085 South Building, Washington, DC 20090-6456. Telephone (202) 690-0262.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The purpose of the meeting is to review the first-phase development of the Quality Through Verification (QTV) Program and other audit-based quality assurance programs administered by the Fruit and

Vegetable Division, and to obtain input regarding their administration, operations, and applicability to the marketplace. QTV is a voluntary, user-fee inspection program for processed and minimally processed fruits and vegetables and certain other commodities in which USDA specialists work with company management to validate the facility's HACCP-based QTV Plan and, through on-site audits, verify its effectiveness. HACCP is a scientific, analytical, and economical approach to ensure food is safe, wholesome, and of high quality. Firms operating under QTV can use a specifically designed USDA QTV shield on their packages. Other programs are directed principally to the assurance of uniform quality in fresh-pack fruits, vegetables, and related products. These programs are in the pilot stage of development.

The exchange of views and information among industry, technical experts, other interested parties, and the Department should result in improved public understanding and participation as well as cost effective and reliable implementation of these programs. The meeting is open to the public, but space is limited. Persons wishing to provide statements or otherwise attend should notify the Deputy Director by January 21, 1997.

At that time please inform the Deputy Director of any special accommodations that may be needed. Any member of the public may file a written statement with AMS before, during, or after the meeting. Minutes of the meeting will be available on request.

Dated: December 16, 1996.

Robert C. Keeney,

Director, Fruit and Vegetable Division.

[FR Doc. 96-32285 Filed 12-19-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-02-M

7 CFR Part 955

[Docket No. FV96-955-1 FIR]

Vidalia Onions Grown in Georgia; Assessment Rate

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Department of Agriculture (Department) is adopting as a final rule, without change, the

provisions of an interim final rule establishing an assessment rate for the Vidalia Onion Committee (Committee) under Marketing Order No. 955 for the 1996-97 and subsequent fiscal periods. The Committee is responsible for local administration of the marketing order which regulates the handling of Vidalia onions grown in Georgia. Authorization to assess Vidalia onion handlers enables the Committee to incur expenses that are reasonable and necessary to administer the program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: September 15, 1996.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Doris Jamieson, Marketing Assistant, Southeast Marketing Field Office, Fruit and Vegetable Division, AMS, USDA, P.O. Box 2276, Winter Haven, FL 33883-2276, telephone 941-299-4770; FAX 941-299-5169, or Martha Sue Clark, Program Assistant, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Division, AMS, USDA, P.O. Box 96456, room 2525-S, Washington, DC 20090-6456, telephone 202-720-9918; FAX 202-720-5698. Small businesses may request information on compliance with this regulation by contacting: Jay Guerber, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Division, AMS, USDA, P.O. Box 96456, Room 2525-S, Washington, DC 20090-6456; telephone 202-720-2491; FAX 202-720-5698.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This rule is issued under Marketing Agreement and Order No. 955, both as amended (7 CFR part 955), regulating the handling of Vidalia onions grown in Georgia, hereinafter referred to as the "order." The marketing agreement and order are effective under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C. 601-674), hereinafter referred to as the "Act."

The Department is issuing this rule in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

This rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. Under the marketing order now in effect, Vidalia onion handlers are subject to assessments. Funds to administer the order are derived from such assessments. It is intended that the assessment rate as issued herein will be applicable to all assessable Vidalia onions beginning September 15, 1996, and continuing until amended, suspended, or terminated. This rule will not preempt any State or local laws,